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THE HAINANESE MIAO

(Miss) M. M. MONINGER

101 162 Far down in the mountainous interior of Hainan, principally in the districts of Loh-hoe and Deng-ang, several hundred Miao villages may be found. These Miao people, essentially a nomadic race, build their rude villages, live on the hillside a few years until the natural fertility of the soil seems to them to be exhausted, and then move to a virgin soil. Hainan's population embraces three great divisions—the Loi aborigines (several tribes of which have become much like the Chinese in everything except language), the Chinese and the Miao. The Chinese seem to be unable to distinguish between "wild" Loi and Miao, classing them all indiscriminately as Loi robbers, but they are very distinct peoples, each tribe having its own language and customs.

166 The Miao people are not native to Hainan. They themselves say that they came from Kwangsi five or six generations ago. They are practically all of one tribe, judging by the embroidered head kerchief of the women, but a few villages of a different type are found in Deng-ang. We would be very glad indeed to get in touch with Miao people in other parts of China who speak the same dialect as our people, and if any readers of this article recognize from the following descriptions, Miao who are similar to the Hainanese Miao, correspondence would be welcomed.

121 114 It has been my privilege, at two different times, to spend periods of three weeks each, itinerating among these people, and to have seen a number of their villages, both heathen and Christian. Certain general characteristics are true of all their villages and a description of one would apply to all. Let me take as typical the village of Baéh-túi-vóe or White-water-tail.

361 This village is situated near a lovely rocky river, on a tiny hill rising from the stream. Whether you come to the village from the north or from the south, you must scramble down a narrow, precipitous foot-path from the top of a mountain to the village, your carriers balancing their loads as best they can, and your pony in infinite danger of falling

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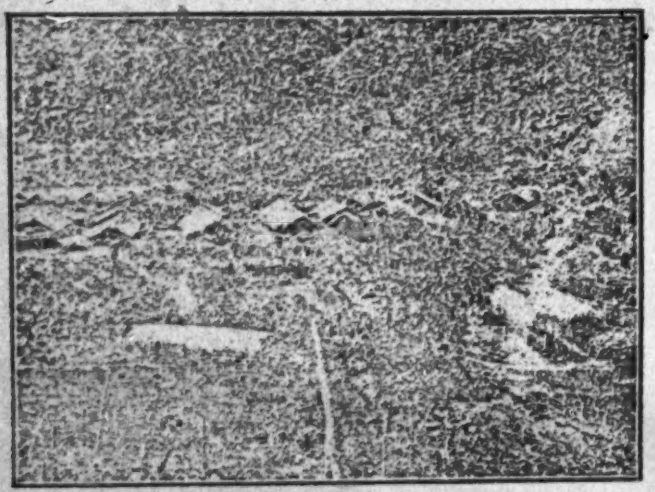
and breaking his legs. In reverse order, when you leave you toil up a hill. That is the plan of all the villages—built in a valley between high hills, and near a stream. Doubtless two factors cause this choice of location—one the need of water and one the protection from robbers that the inaccessible position affords.



MIAO VILLAGE.

The villages vary in size from six or eight houses to forty or fifty. White-water-tail, an average sized village, has I think about twenty houses. The villages are loosely organized under two or three head men, one of whom looks after taxes or rents of fields if any have to be paid, and one of whom is charged with welcoming any guests and looking after any strangers who come. Hainanese trader, European explorer or Christian missionary, woe betide you if you do not go to this head man's house when you first arrive, otherwise you will find it impossible to obtain food and shelter in the village. These men seem to be chosen by common consent when a village is built and apparently hold office as long as the village remains in that location, barring unusual conditions. If new families join a village, it must be with the consent of both villages concerned.

When the site of a village has been selected, the houses are set down wherever the builder chooses to put them, so in very few villages are there anything like straight lanes between the houses. (Streets would be too much of a misnomer to use in this connection). As the houses are built, curving, twisting, snake-like paths develop between

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361 house and house, village and stream, village and forest, and later between village and village. The villages being on the
342 sloping hillsides, the householder must first level off the
361 site he has chosen. This he does carefully, and the bank of earth twelve or eighteen inches high left at one side of the plot makes the protection for the back side of the house. A shallow trench is dug between this bank and the edge of the wall, and around the other three sides of the rectangular levelled place, to drain off the torrents of water that fall during the tropical storms.

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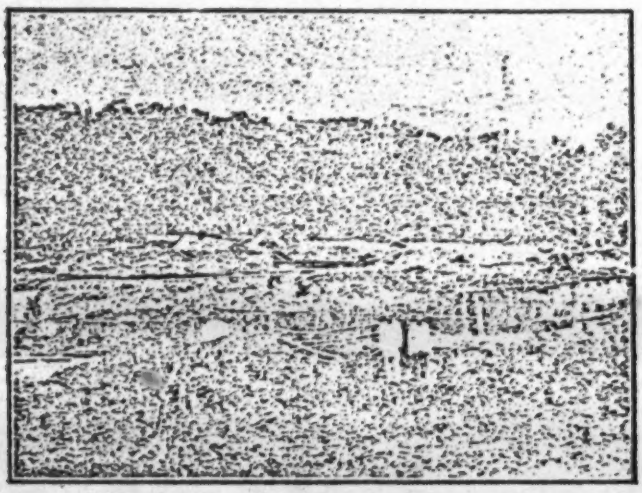

MIAO VILLAGE.

342 Four strong poles, standing about six feet above the ground, are driven firmly into the earth at each corner of the house-to-be. Ordinary houses are about thirty feet long and ten feet wide. At the middle of the two ends higher poles, standing about ten feet above the ground, are put in, and two more of the same height in the centre of the building and on a line with them, to hold the ridge-pole. Smaller posts are planted at regular intervals along the longer sides, and heavy bamboo or light timbers laid upon them to form the rest of the skeleton of the house. Light bamboo poles are lashed to ridgepole and sidepoles to take the place of rafters, and the top of the house is ready for the roof. No nails are used in the structure. Fastenings are made by means of bamboo or rattan withes, tied securely in place.

Roofing is done with one of three different kinds of material. Sometimes the leaves of the fan palm are used, laid overlapping each other. This roof is very easy to mend.

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as you merely stick another fan under the thatch wherever the water is dripping through. Sometimes bundles of a heavy swamp grass are used, or the third alternative is rattan. The big rattan branches are taken, stripped of leaves on one side of the mid-rib, laid one above the other with the leaves overlapping, and the whole section fastened to the roof. This sort of roofing takes longer to prepare but is probably the most durable of the three. 342

The walls are the next problem. Often they are of bamboo stakes driven into the ground close together and chinked with mud up to the low roof. Sometimes they are simply split bamboo woven into screens and fastened firmly into place. No windows are left except tiny square openings in the walls and these are by no means universal. One door is left in the middle of the long front side of the house, a bamboo screen with bamboo withes for hinges and an ingenious bamboo latchstring. The eaves project two or three feet over the roof edge in every direction. At the back they thus extend almost to the top of the bank of earth mentioned above. In the front they extend down so near the ground that it is almost impossible to enter from that side, but a simple matter to enter this tunnel-like verandah at the end of the house and walk along close to the wall until the door is reached. The pig troughs are usually situated under this verandah, and the chicken coops also. Trough and chicken coop are hardly the proper names for the articles though they are used for those purposes. Their construction will be explained later. At one or perhaps both ends of the house the roof is extended three or four feet and under the shelter thus formed the household firewood, rice mortar, fishing and other implements are stored. The cows, if the family possesses any, are tied at night in a rude shelter near the house.

The floor of the house is made of pounded mud, cracking in dry weather and damp in rainy seasons. The general division of house space is shown in the accompanying sketch. Two stones make the fireplace and the crude iron skillet rests on them while the fire is built on the floor. Long logs are burned, being pushed into the fire as they gradually burn away. The smoke finds an outlet wherever it can, as there is no chimney. Above the fire a shelf of bamboo holds the family supply of corn or whatnot that needs drying. Hanging shelves on either side of the living room hold the family property. The rice room has a floor of woven bamboo, about a foot from the ground. As sons of the family marry, another room may be built on to the original house, if the new family does not set up a separate establishment entirely. [354] [352]

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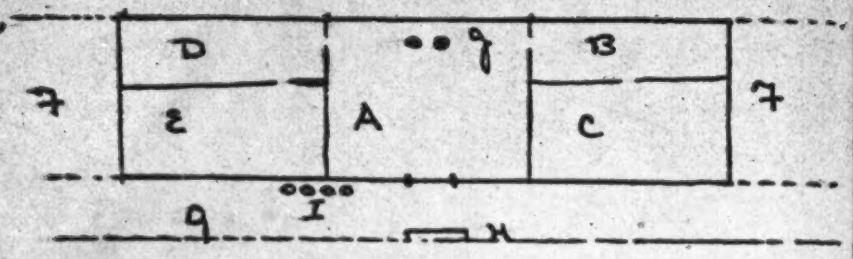

A—Living Room.
B—Parents' Room.
C—Rice Room.
D—Daughters' Room.
E—Sons' Room.
Used for various purposes.

F—Shelter for wood, etc.
G—Front verandah.
H—Pig trough.
I—Chicken coops.
J—Fire place.

I have seen one or two houses where there were three and four main entrances to the front verandah.

412 415 The utensils and implements used by the Miao are of the simplest. Rude iron hoes, heavy knives and the clumsy iron skillets are purchased from the Hainanese traders. Sometimes the skillets are lacking and the rice is steamed

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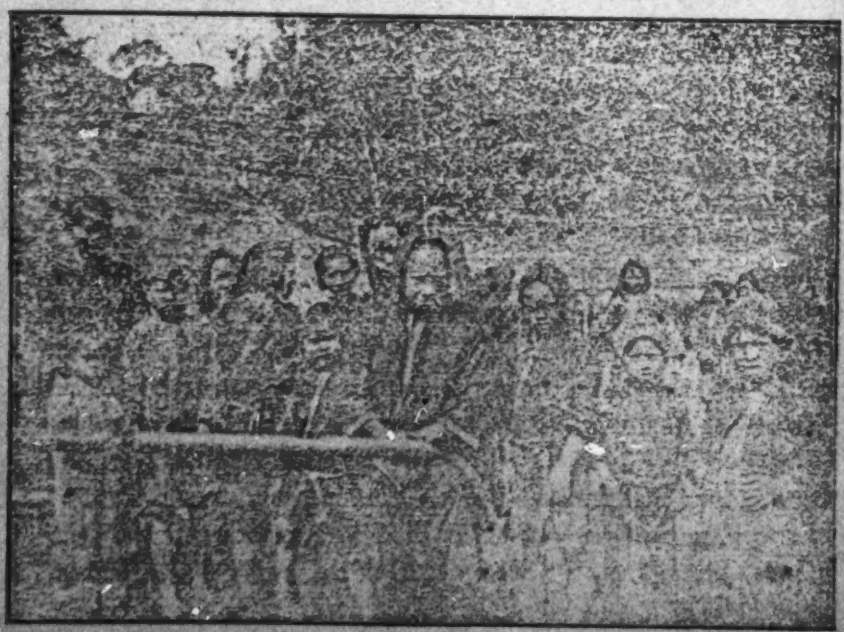

A GROUP OF MIAO WOMEN AND CHILDREN GATHERED ROUND THE PIPE THAT CARRIES THE WATER TO THE VILLAGE FROM A STREAM ABOVE.

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in hollowed-out tree trunks lined with leaves of the wild banana. Every man has his hunting knife, carried in a wicker pouch at his back. The chopping knives for clearing the forest are heavier. Every family seems to have at least one gun, a clumsy, heavy, old-fashioned type, used in hunting. The pig trough is a hollow log, the family wash-basin a cross section of a big tree rudely scooped and hollowed out. The rice mortars too are cross sections of trees, and the mallets are wooden, not even stone-tipped, in most cases. The ever-present bamboo and rattan make the rice sieves, the woven baskets used as chicken coops, the beds, and the little baskets swung from the roof beam, in which the baby is put when it is not on its mother's back or in a hammock-like piece of cloth. The fishnets are woven of the native hemp, as are the bags which the women swing across their backs and use to carry corn, sweet potatoes, other tubers, or anything they happen to wish to move. Water is carried in rude wooden buckets, possibly in kerosene tins, if a family has somehow come into possession of such articles, in small earthenware jars, or in three foot length sections of large bamboo. These latter are used if the water must be gotten from a very shallow stream, as three or four of them lashed together hold almost as much as a bucket and can be laid down flat in the stream. Clothes are washed at the river side, on flat stones.

The people make their living by farming, depending on hunting and fishing to supplement their food supply. Different from the Chinese, they know nothing of fertilizing their fields except by the use of wood ashes. Neither do they know how to raise rice in paddy fields, but plant only the upland glutinous rice, of which they have ten or eleven varieties, most of them white. They clear the steep mountain sides by cutting out some of the brush and smaller timber, burn off the place, dig up the ground with their small hoes, and raise two or three crops of rice, maize, and sweet potatoes. When the rice is ripe it is cut and bound in small bundles. These bundles are placed in racks under thatched roofs to dry and sweat and later stored in the rice rooms in the houses, and beaten out and pounded as needed. When the fertility in one place is exhausted they go to another hillside and repeat the process. When all the hillsides within easy distance (what they call "easy distance" would be four hours' walk for a foreigner) are used up they have no recourse but to move their whole village, so move they do. One advantage of course is that the housewife does not need to clean her domicile, and the smoky, grimy house of several years' use can well be left—but it is a bitter life,

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THIS SHOWS THE TERRIBLE WASTE OF TIMBER. THE MIAOS BURN THE GRASS AND FOLIAGE TO SOW THE UPLAND RICE.

at best. They are truly "the eternal pioneers," and one old-young woman told me she had moved *twelve* times in her life of forty-odd years.

231 241 262 Their few pigs they cannot afford to eat except at wedding feasts, but sell them to the Hainanese traders. Chickens and ducks they eat occasionally, and also prepare the salted eggs. They raise very few greens but occasionally will buy them from a neighbouring Loi village. Corn is raised a great deal—a small variety of maize that does very well on the hillsides. The heart of a certain variety of palm tree is a common food, and in times of famine roots of trees and brakes, bark, anything, must be used to stay the pangs of hunger. A well-to-do family may own a few cows, but they have a curious custom which they often follow, of giving their cows to the neighbouring Lois to care for. The calves of course revert to the original owner, but the Lois use the animals to work their rice fields and to haul the great logs of hardwood to the rivers.

224 261 Bears are found in the mountains, and the Miao prepare pitfalls and traps for them, shooting them when they have been thus captured. A species of small antelope makes very good eating. Wild boar are also often captured, and likewise

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the porcupine, whose flesh is eaten, and whose shiny black and white quills, often a foot long, have various uses. The flying squirrel is a rarer victim, as only the poisoned dart shot from the crossbow by a skilled hunter is quick enough to strike it. Jungle fowl of all sorts are used for food.

The fishing is usually done on a large scale. If a youngster goes a-fishing, his outfit is a piece of bamboo and a piece of hemp string with a noose on the end, where he nooses his catch. But when the rivers are low a whole village or perhaps several villages will join in a common fishing expedition. Some of the men dam the river, others go to the forest and come back laden with the bark of a certain tree and a certain vine. These barks are pounded in mortars until well macerated, mixed, and pounds and pounds of the "medicine" are poured into the river above the dam. The mixture kills or stupifies the fish, which rise to the top of the water and are easily secured. The catch often amounts to a thousand-odd pounds of fish, not to mention crabs and eels and other creatures. The fish are cleaned immediately and the people eat them without fear although they say that a chicken or duck that eats the entrails will sometimes die from the poison. The fish not wanted for immediate consumption are salted down with a variety of pooped rice and kept for future use. This method may injure the small fish in the river—undoubtedly it does injure them in the immediate vicinity of the catching—but does not have any serious effect on the total supply, apparently.

The costume worn by the men differs very little from that worn by an ordinary Chinese labourer except in the way the coat fastens, as it laps a little to the left and fastens slantingly down the front. The costume worn by the women however, is the distinguishing feature of the people, and is a very attractive outfit in its blue and red with touches of other colours on the head kerchief. For a grown woman, the costume consists of a kerchief, a coat and a short skirt, both dark blue, and dark blue puttees. A narrow red silk girdle, about an inch wide, woven by the women themselves and ending in long fringe, is worn around the hips. The same style of tie, only about a quarter of an inch wide, fastens each puttee just below the knee. The material for the clothing is bought from the traders, and is a coarse, heavy, unbleached cotton cloth. The women dye the goods with indigo and set the colour with pigs blood. The coat is made quite like a Chinese woman's coat, but reaching to the knees and not lapping so far over to the side. A piece of turkey red cotton is embroidered and put on as a narrow collar band; the bottoms of the rather loose sleeves are edged the same

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291 way, and pieces are also put on both sides of the coat where it fastens, for a distance of six or seven inches down from the collar. The side seams are open for about eight inches from the bottom of the coat and are edged with red.

291 The skirt is a double piece of the same goods, the fold coming at the bottom, and reaches to the knees. It is tied 531 around the hips with a tape. The skirt is not embroidered, but is elaborately stamped with figures of trees, bamboo, etc., in a distinct pattern. The method of stamping is very ingenious. A small piece of bamboo about eight inches long is whittled to a very narrow width in the centre for a distance of a quarter or an eighth of an inch, and the two ends then brought together and fastened, leaving the narrow piece straight across the bottom. Some beeswax is melted, and the woman dips her bamboo instrument in the wax and puts it quickly on the undyed goods. Dipping, dipping, dipping she puts her pattern on in perfect regularity, without any sort of guide, if she be skilful at it. Then the cloth is dyed, but the dye cannot penetrate the wax, which is later scalded off with boiling water, and the pattern is left, a very faint blue on the dark blue skirt.

The kerchief is embroidered with many symbolic designs. It too is the same dark blue cloth, a piece about fourteen inches square. With lighter blue thread and silk of all colours the cloth is almost covered with cross stitch and other forms of embroidery. The younger women and the girls make their's very gay, the older women not so much so. It is said that a woman working steadily takes a month to finish one kerchief, and a woman who must work too, will often need a year to finish one. So they are not easy to buy, even at the price of one dollar which we always give. The central motif is always worked out on the square as a basis, with the octagon and the isosceles right triangle as the natural variations in the figures. The swastika symbol is used a great deal. Birds, butterflies, silkworm moths, trees, flowers, horses, dogs, dragons, tortoises, Loi children and Hainanese children (two very different figures—and never a figure of a Miao child)—these are some of the symbols I managed to identify. The women speak very little Hainanese and I know no Miao so it was impossible to get all their meanings. The kerchief is worn with one point over the forehead and one down the back of the neck, the other two corners being brought around and tied in a knot at the back of the head. The younger girls wear the same costume as the women with the exception that they usually have pointed hoods, also embroidered, or sometimes hoods with the crown cut out to show the kerchief beneath. The babies wear little

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round caps with symbols embroidered around the bottom, and sometimes with a few coloured beads on strings used as additional ornaments. The special goodluck charm seems to be worked only on the children's caps. The heathen Miao women wear large silver earrings, and at the weddings the bride wears a long silver chain attached to her two silver hairpins. Physically, the Miao are quite a different type from the Chinese. They are shorter, generally, and more lithe and agile. They are not especially slant-eyed, and their eyes are a lighter, softer brown, often sparkling with a merry twinkle as they talk. They are entirely monogamous, and the husband and wife eat together, work together, and have much more of a normal family life than is seen among the Chinese. The women go to work in the fields or the woods, carrying their babies strapped to their backs much as the Cantonese women carry their children, with an immense palmleaf stuck under the shoulder band, to keep the sun and rain from the child.

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The young people are married at seventeen or eighteen, and it seems to make no difference whether the young couple live with the groom's parents, the bride's parents, or set up housekeeping in their own home. The wedding is usually held at the groom's home, two or three young girls and a young man or two from his village going for the bride and escorting her back. The bride wears no distinctive dress except a peculiar headdress under her kerchief, and an embroidered girdle of undyed cloth. She also carries two small towels of this same material thrown over her shoulders, and one to cover her face. According to their custom, the bride and groom sit on the same bench and eat and drink together, and then declare their allegiance to the family by serving tea to the parents or in some other simple way.

The Miao in their heathen state apparently worshipped any and all gods in an effort to appease them but with little definite idea or set ritual. Idols do not seem to be in evidence in their houses, and being a roving people, they have no temples. They have within the last few years become interested in the Gospel and whole villages have become Christian, much as has been the case in the mass movement, so called, in India. They are a simple people, highly emotional and temperamentally religious, which is often true of hill peoples. Thus certain emotional phases of religion immediately become paramount in their eyes, and without careful teaching they are liable to be led astray on these points.

The Miao have no written language of their own, but pick up Chinese character with amazing rapidity. The Christian villages each put up a chapel at their own expense, meet every morning for prayer before they go to their work, and every evening for a short service and an hour or so of study. When a Chinese evangelist or a missionary comes to the village, they study until midnight, when they are sent home in self-defence by the teachers—and at 2 a.m. they are up pounding rice, so that we wonder when they sleep. They are a wonderfully interesting people, these "Children of the Forest," as they style themselves, and it is a rare privilege to be among them and come to know them.